

direction. They also emphasise the importance of fulfilling moral obligations, the capacity to begin tasks, and follow through to completion despite boredom or distractions.

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PREVALENCE AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF SYNCHRONICITY EXPERIENCES IN THE CLINICAL SETTING³

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Attempts to explain synchronicity experiences by mainstream science argue believers in the paranormal are more prone to seeing meaningful patterns in randomness (Blackmore & Moore, 1994) or underestimate the probability of their occurring by chance (Brugger et al, 1993). However, empirical studies testing these theories have found mixed results. Brugger, Landis, and Regard (1990) found a moderate correlation between belief in the paranormal and subjective frequency of coincidences, whereas others have found no differences between believers and sceptics in terms of probability misjudgement (Blackmore, 1997; Bressan, 2002). Regardless of whether synchronicity experiences are associated with a belief in the paranormal or are indeed random events, a large body of literature exists that claims synchronicity experiences (meaningful coincidence between an inner event and an external event occurring simultaneously or at a future point in time) frequently occur in clinical settings, especially in psychotherapeutic settings, and that they can promote personal growth (Jung, 1952; Keutzer, 1984; Nachman, 2009). For example, there have been occurrences where the therapist has dreamt information about the client that is later verified as correct (Ehrenwald, 1948; Orloff, 1996) or where the therapeutic setting becomes part of the synchronistic event, the most notable being the Scarab beetle scenario⁴ (cf. Jung, 1952). It has been proposed that synchronicity may be more likely in the psychotherapy setting given the openness to unconscious communication, the salience of the therapeutic relationship, and the development of symbolic thought (Marlo & Kline, 1998). However, we still know relatively little about how common synchronicity experiences are in different clinical settings or how they are interpreted by clinicians with different therapeutic orientations (i.e. psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and counsellors). This is surprising given that such experiences could have implications for the therapeutic relationship, the clinical outcome, and models of psi. Anomalous experiences that occur in the clinical setting are an important consideration for mental health professionals and parapsychologists as research findings will add to our knowledge of a growing area tentatively termed “clinical parapsychology” (Belz,

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⁴ Jung recounts a therapeutic session in which a client who was resistant to change describes a dream about a golden scarab beetle at the exact moment he heard a tapping on the window, only to find that it was a beetle closely resembling the scarab. Jung saw the scarab as an Egyptian symbol of rebirth and discussed the coincidence with the client, which helped to bring about transformation.

2009) and may point to the need for a more integrative approach to therapy that acknowledges anomalous experiences as subjectively real for the client.

This research brief outlines two planned studies investigating synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting using a mixed methods approach. Firstly, a quantitative study, involving a nationwide survey, with a representative sample of clinicians (psychiatrists, counsellors, clinical psychologists, and psychotherapists) is under construction to investigate the range and incidence of synchronicity experiences within different clinical settings. For example, how common are synchronicity experiences? Are there any differences between clinicians in terms of occurrences and form of synchronicity experiences? Secondly, a qualitative study using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996) will explore the phenomenology of synchronicity experiences by interviewing a purposive sample of clinicians who report such experiences in their therapeutic sessions. Interviews will focus on how synchronicity experiences are interpreted by different clinicians (e.g. as evidence of psi/anomalous communication, as products of random events to which meaning is attached and/or as useful for the therapeutic process) and what features influence these interpretations. Interviews will also explore how clinicians make sense of these experiences. For example, what do they mean to them? How do they identify a synchronistic experience? As such, the research is not concerned with whether synchronicity is proof of psi phenomena *per se*; rather it seeks to establish how common these experiences are within different clinical settings and explores the process and nature of these experiences from the perspective of the clinician. The current status of the research will be reported during the presentation.

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AN INVESTIGATION OF GHOSTLY PHENOMENA AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE AND HAVE NOT HAD SUCH AN EXPERIENCE

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There has been a recent surge of interest in environmental variables in apparitional and poltergeist cases. However, whilst being extremely valuable, these fieldwork studies have focused on these environmental variables and neglected the circumstances and psychological characteristics of the people concerned. Research has begun to examine individual differences in environmental sensitivity and there is some suggestion that more environmentally sensitive people are more likely to report apparition-type experiences. It could be that such people respond more to the effects of environmental variables causing the experiences or, if ghosts are objectively real, it could be that such people are more likely to detect their presence. Amongst the general public there also seems to be an assumption that ghostly phenomena only occur at night and in darkness, and this seems to be reinforced by recent television programmes.

Studies comparing the personality characteristics of people who have experienced apparitions with a matched control group who have not are rare. Personality dimensions that might differentiate between these groups include fantasy proneness, boundary structure and transliminality. Given the overlap of these constructs, a recent study suggested that transliminality is the most appropriate measure to use. A few studies have found a relationship between transliminality and paranormal experiences generally and ghosts/poltergeist/other encounter experiences specifically but no studies seem to have considered different